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ABSTRACT

A study compared General Equivalency Development (GED) program completion and Adult Performance Level (APL) attainment in West Virginia. During the study, 97 GED program participants, who were not exposed to APL instruction or materials, completed the APL survey either just before or immediately after taking the GED examination. Seventy-seven of the subjects were successful on the GED exam and 20 were not. Only three subjects who were successful on the GED test scored below average on the APL test. In fact, 23 of the successful subjects scored above average on the APL instrument. Since their preparation consisted only of the usual GED preparation program, it appears that such preparation may also adequately prepare one in fundamental competencies such as those measured by the APL test. Furthermore, it appears that no difference in the functional competencies of the successful male and female GED takers exists as measured by the APL test. If, as the study seems to indicate, the GED and APL are equally valid measurements of one's equivalent educational level, then it would seem logical to recognize both on a par and grant diplomas accordingly. (MN)

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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GED COMPLETION AND APL ATTAINMENT IN WEST VIRGINIA

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In November of 1976, at the AEA/NAPCAE Conference in New York City, a paper entitled "The Adult Performance Level Program: A Serious and Deliberate Examination" was presented. One of the seven major observations contained in that paper stated "Given the points raised in this paper concerning the similarity of the assessments made by the GED and APL tests, it would be instructive for the field of adult education to consider the extent to which these two tests measure the same set of basic skills. Since both the GED and APL tests purport to measure reading, writing, and computation skills, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the constructs being assessed are not significantly different."[1] It was this statement which gave impetus to this study.

Since the Texas study impacted on the consciousness of the american public in general and the adult education practioners in particular, the battle lines have been drawn.

There are those who contend that there is no need for such a massive effort in APL since a well developed and directed GED preparation program will turn out functionally competent adults. In fact, it is said that such has been the case for many years. This position seems to have some support in the studies done by John Wallace[2] and Ronald Cervero.[3]

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[1]"The Adult Performance Level Program: A serious and deliberate examination," paper presented at NAPCAE/AEA Convention, New York City, November 20, 1976.

[2]Final Report on Project Career Success (H-035) Volume I: Activities, Proceedures, and Evaluation. Venice - Lincoln Technical Center, 1978.

[3]The Relationship Between the GED Testing Program and Competency-Based Education," paper presented at the National Invitational Workshop on Competency-Based Adult Education, Austin, Texas, June 22, 1978.

On the other side of the fence are those who claim there is not the slightest doubt but what we need the APL approach much more than we need the old GED preparation system. These folks suggest that GED preparation does just that; prepare one to pass a test but does not necessarily mean one is functionally competent upon passing said test.

Purpose of the Study

This study was not undertaken to put to rest such differences of opinion, but rather, it was disigned to look at the implications of such statements with respect to this State's programs.

There were several learning centers in the state which attempted to incorporate the APL concept into their structure. While none of these centers was successful in doing so on an extensive scale, they were able to include portions of it. Much depended on the immediate need of the students themselves. If they were not in a hurry and were willing to delay the taking of the GED, they were exposed to APL type materials as well as GED materials. For those whose need was more immediate and were unable or unwilling to delay the taking of the GED exam, the traditional GED preparation methods prevailed.

In addition to the reluctance of the students to participate in an APL type curriculum as opposed to a GED one, there is, at present, no means available to recognize the APL attainment on a par with the GED.

Since the APL concept had been dealt with rather extensively in the past three years and its role in the State's program was still not clear, it seemed an appropriate time to look at it.

Design of the Study

The subjects for this study were drawn from the ranks of those who followed the GED preparation approach and were not exposed to APL instruction or materials. The Adult APL Survey (form ASI) of the American College Testing Program was administered to the subjects either just before they took the GED test or just after having taken it. In either case, no more than a ten day differential was present. In addition, some effort was made to reduce the possibility that the instructors would alter their teaching styles or methods, in this instance, by not contacting them in advance.

They were asked to administer the APL test to their students, as a part of this study, no more than 15 days before they were scheduled to take the GED. Thus the greatest share of the preparation had already taken place.

Originally 100 such subjects were tested. For various reasons three of the subjects results were invalidated. This resulted in a total of 97 usable returns. Of these 97, 38 were female and 59 were male. They ranged in age from 17 to 68. For purposes of the study the subjects were grouped into the following age catagories: 1) 30 and under, 2) 31 to 60, and 3) over 60.

Analysis of Data:

As shown in figure 1, of the 97 subjects used in the study, 77 of them were successful on the GED and 20 of them were unsuccessful. This results in a 80/20 per cent split between those who passed the GED and those who failed. That represents a rather respectable success rate for first attempters.

Figure 1 also shows the break down of those same 97 subjects with respect to their APL attainment. As can be seen a small number of those

who were successful on the GED test scored below average on the APL test. With only three such individuals, it appears to be of little significance. The fact that 23 or 30% of those same successful subjects scored above average on the APL instrument appears to be much more impressive.

While there were fewer numbers of those tested who were unsuccessful in their attempts to pass the GED test, the resultant data is of more than passing interest. Figure 1 shows a total of 20 such subjects. It also indicates that 11, or just slightly over 50% of those unsuccessful GED candidates attained an average level on the APL test. This takes on a rather interesting aspect when the total number of subjects attaining average or above average levels on the APL test from both groups are combined. If this is done, it yields a total of 85 out of 97, or 87% of those subjects functioning on an acceptable level.

Since these people's preparation consisted only of the usual GED preparation program, it would seem to indicate that such preparation may also adequately prepare one in functional competencies such as those measured by the APL test.

A breakdown of the participants by sex also yields some interesting data. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate that breakdown for the 38 females and the 59 males.

Interestingly the number of females and the number of males who rated average on the APL test, yields the same percentage in both cases-- 66%. The female/male percentage for above average ratings were 27% and 31% respectively.

Based on this comparison, it would appear that there is no real difference in the functional competencies of the successful male and female GED takers as measured by the APL test.

Conclusions

Given the restricted size of the sample any conclusions reached should not be construed as applicable to the population in general. Yet, they ought not to be simply dismissed as useless. For, based on the outcomes of this small sample it would appear that a GED preparation program may indeed provide one with the necessary competencies to be considered as functionally average or above average in our everyday world.

If this is so, there may not be a need for two such tests, two such sets of materials, or two such programs in any one location or center. This becomes important when one considers the time and effort, not to mention the money, which is invested in these areas. But, even more significant for us here in West Virginia, and I suspect many other places, is the fact that the passing of the APL test with an average or above average rating is not salable. There is, at present, no way to grant a person the equivalent of a high school diploma for such achievement. Under those circumstances it becomes a less than viable option for the student.

It may be argued that the content is different. That people need both. But, the reality is that you can't sell it that way. Not when employers want a diploma.

If the GED and APL are as likely to measure one's equivalent educational level, as this study seems to indicate, then one of the logical

options is to recognize both on a par and grant diplomas accordingly. As indicated, this study was not undertaken to answer, once and for all, that question. It was done to examine that area as it might exist here in West Virginia. That has been done and recommendations will be made to those whose responsibility it is to decide its role here in this state.

GED Disposition			APL Attainment		
Age Groups	Pass	Fail	Below Avg.	Average	Above Avg.
30 and Under	50	16	9	43	14
31 to 60	25	3	2	17	9
Over 60	2	1	1	2	

Figure 1 - Total Participation Breakdown

	Passed GED	APL Ratings BA	A	AA	Failed GED	APL Ratings BA	A	AA
30 and under	18	1	13	4	1		1	
31/60	17	1	10	6	1		1	
over 60	1		1					

Figure 2 - Female Participants

	Passed GED	APL Ratings BA	A	AA	Failed GED	APL Ratings BA	A	AA
30 and under	32		22	10	15	8	7	
31/60	8	1	4	3	2		2	
over 60	1		1		1	1		

Figure 3 - Male Participants